8:van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

The man who is next door to Russia

Chancellor Raab of Austria

By Kees van Hoek

[Facing p. 46]

8:van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

The man who is next door to Russia

344

I HAD NOT been at the Ballhausplatz in Vienna since the last months of Chancellor Schuschnigg. Bombs have since destroyed the rooms as I knew them. They have been restored in modern Viennese splendor.

344
643

Here, Chancellor Julius Raab received me in the vast room paneled in precious woods. From the high ceiling hang two crystal chandeliers. The Austrian eagle is inlaid on the wall behind the chancellor's desk, gold-embossed on his high-backed leather chair, and woven into the curtains before the three big windows. It looks symbolically like a phoenix risen from the ashes.

Gone are the days when the Ballhausplatz ranked with the Quai d'Orsay or Downing St. Yet, although Austria has ceased to be a great power, her geographical position as a key country kept her statesmen in the world limelight—Seipel, Dollfuss, Schuschnigg.

8:van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

643

Since the end of the 2nd World War, an avowed aim of which was to restore an independent Austria, an Austrian chancellor has resided in Metternich's palace. For eight years he was an engineer of peasant stock, Leopold Figl. This summer he made way for the leader of his party, another engineer, this time of solid middle-class background, Julius Raab.

The chancellor led me to a comfortable conference corner at the far end of the room, where a green velvet settee and easy chairs were grouped round a low table. The chancellor promptly lit one of those long, thin, black cigars called "Virginias," so popular among Austrians.

He is tall, big boned, massively built; his nearly square head has a low-set jaw. He is 62, but his thinning hair is gray only at the temples. He has the appearance of the typical Austrian burgher: solid, from his sober suit down to his boots, but *gemütlich*. There is great

[46a]

643 shrewdness behind his narrow-lidded eyes, but when his slow smile breaks through, it relaxes the noncommital face.

Raab comes from St. Pölten, the nearest big town to Vienna, 50 miles to the west. His people have been architects and builders there for generations; one of three brothers (the eldest still runs the family business), Julius never had any other ambition himself as a youngster.

At the Benedictine grammar school of Seitenstetten he excelled in mathematics, and from there he matriculated to the Technical university of Vienna. The 1st World War interrupted his student years. He served with distinction on the Russian and Italian fronts, won the Big Silver Medal for bravery, a decoration which is rarely given to officers. Amidst the utter disruption of the army in November, 1918, he managed to bring his company back from the front in perfect order.

The collapse of the empire struck Vienna with fearful impact. Ex-Lieutenant Raab felt the loss of the great Hapsburg tradition deeply. He had returned to his studies and the Students' Representative body elected him as their spokesman to the university authorities.

Even in high school, he had been interested in sociology. In his first prewar Vienna years he joined the group round Monsignor Schaurhofer, fired by the new social teach-

8:van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

643 ings of Pope Leo XIII's encyclicals. Now, in the dark postwar misery, he took an active part in Students' Help, organized by Professor of Theology Innitzer, now Cardinal Archbishop. They provided free meals and distributed clothes. Those "terrible years," as he calls them, have impregnated the conservative background of his home with a strong social consciousness. Even later, when he emerged as a leading economist, he never lost his early understanding of the struggle of the small people.

After graduating as Engineer (*Ing.* is an academic title in Germanic countries, used like our *Dr.*) Ing. Raab went into the family business. At the same time, he turned to politics, a field that interested him from early youth: his mother's brother was a distinguished member of the imperial Reichstag. In 1927, his home town elected him as their Christian Social deputy to Parliament. "For the first year," he recalls, "I sat back and listened, to learn the ropes." He had an unbounded admiration for the chancellor, Monsignor Ignaz Seipel, "the greatest statesman Austria ever had."

665 643 Austrian politics became so bitter in those years that every big party had a military organization. Once the Socialists armed themselves, Prince Starhemberg founded the anti-Socialist *Heimwehr*. Raab joined it at the instigation of Seipel, who wanted him to work inside

[665] 643 the Heimwehr against Starhemberg's fascist tendencies. Inevitably, Raab and Starhemberg fell out. Raab left the *Heimwehr*. The communists call Raab a fascist, but that is stupid.

After Parliament was dispensed with under the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg regime, Raab won high repute as founder, organizer, and leader of the *Gewerbebund*, a nation-wide organization of all the trades, crafts, and industries. When Chancellor Schuschnigg made his last desperate attempt to stave off Hitler, he rallied the biggest names in the land around him. He made Raab minister of trade and transport.

After Hitler annexed his native Austria to the *Reich*, Raab was, of course, out in the wilderness. He was never personally persecuted, but he could not risk the family fortune by rejoining their old firm, and he started out on his own, in Vienna. So deep was nazi hatred towards Raab that at the outbreak of the 2nd World War he was formally declared unworthy of wearing a German uniform!

727 642 645 The Russians entered Vienna in the spring of 1945. Marshal Tolbukhin ordered a provisional government in which the Catholics, Socialists, and communists had to share every ministry. Builder Raab became secretary of state in the ministry for reconstruction, but was vetoed by the Russians as a minister in Figl's cabinet.

s:Van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

643 441 Once more Raab turned his talents to economic fields. He created the Austrian *Wirtschaftsbund,* which reorganized Austrian economy and constituted a federal Chamber of Commerce, of which Raab was first president.

643 665 Raab was one of the founders of the *Oesterreichische Volkspartei,* the (Catholic) Austrian People's party, a deputy since 1948 and its "strong man" from the start. His political position was consolidated when the People's party elected him as their *Parteiobmann,* or leader, in 1951.

In the 1953 general elections, the OVP did not do so well as the Socialists. The party decided that a change of prime minister was needed. A new one, it thought, would more likely get maximum concessions from the Socialists in the coalition government. As things stood, with Catholic and Socialist seats nearly balanced, the OVP could have got a majority with the aid of the small Independent party. But realist Raab holds that in the present difficult international situation, only a strong government of the two biggest parties can achieve that primordial aim, restoration of full Austrian sovereignty.

643 While I was with the chancellor, the clock in his room played a gay carillon to strike the full hour. It did not disturb him. He admitted placidly that he has no ear for music. He never goes to opera or theater, those two glories of Vienna.

1954

He is an addict of Karl May (Austrian equivalent to Fenimore Cooper), in whose yarns he could indulge only on long journeys. At home, he has time to read nothing but politics and economics. For relaxation, he goes to the country; once there, he does not walk or fish, but just "sits in the sun." 643

He has the reputation of being a quietly determined man at ease with himself and with the world, who knows what he wants. Sparse of words, he hates discursive arguments. His own speeches are short and to the point; he hates phrases. He neither whitewashes nor glosses over. They tell you in Vienna that his greatest asset is his flair for sensing the opportune moment; his greatest drawback, a certain improvization as he feels his way ahead. In negotiations he uses humor as a weapon, both to clarify and to demand.

He still lives in the same three-room apartment in the Döbling district which he has occupied for years. His wife is an invalid, so he entertains only at the chancellery. Theirs is a happy though childless marriage.

Raab needs little sleep. He begins work at home long before going to his office, about eight every morning. On Sundays, he drives in his old Chevrolet to high Mass in the Schottenkirche, and then joins the *Stammtisch* reserved for his old party friends at a café on Ring Blvd. There he invariably listens

CHANCELLOR RAAB OF AUSTRIA

more than he takes part in the lively talk. 643

Ten years have passed since the Allies, in a solemn Moscow declaration, proclaimed restoration of Austria's sovereign independence as one of their avowed war aims. Today Austria's position as a "liberated" victim of aggression is in many ways worse than that of the aggressor. 728

Chancellor Raab has taken the activation of his country's foreign policy personally in hand. Reduced to essentials his argument comes to this: Austria is not yet free only because the Allies fell out among themselves, and that is certainly not Austria's fault. After 99% agreement, the state treaty is being held up only as a Russian cold-war tactic (though, he remarked, "the cold war in Europe has never been quite ice-cold in Austria"). But why not withdraw, meanwhile, the occupation armies? Democratic Austria has proved that it can fully maintain law and order by itself, and there would still be the Allied high commissioners in Vienna to watch—no foreign armies are necessary for that. 643 648

Since last summer, relations with the Russians have greatly improved, though nobody can say whether as a reversal from Stalin policy or merely as political tactics. All the same, the belated Russian concessions do not go as far yet as those made much earlier by the Western powers. The chancellor has reacted

8:van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

643 to them with the attitude that one
648 should meet an outstretched hand with good will: "there is no sense in pulling the Bear's tail."

In that atmosphere, he presses Austria's many remaining complaints and aims. With a shrewd appreciation of possible Soviet touchiness at losing face, he bases his reasoning on the argument that it could not be interpreted as a Russian weakness if they give a civilized, democratic and orderly nation that full sovereignty which they solemnly promised.

643 Chancellor Raab stands firmly on the side of the West. He realizes the need of continued close collaboration with the U.S. He is a firm believer in a free economy. His economic platform is that of a firm currency and of stabilized price and wage levels; of creating

8:van Hoek J-3 (no date) 1954
EK1 Austria EK1

643 fuller employment through increased production; and production helped by modifying crushing industrial tax burdens and home and foreign loans for industrial investment. Austria wants to produce and earn her living rather than be subsidized.

My hour with the Austrian Chancellor had come to a close. "The Austrians," he said, "are a lighthearted people who forget easily how bad things were and how much improvement has already been made. But they are good at heart."

Somehow, I felt that even the most intricate international and economic problems lose their forbidding aspect when you hear them explained in the homely dialect and with all the *Gemütlichkeit* of a good, sensible Austrian.

[50a]

8: van Hoek EK1 Austria EK1
159

[For biographic data on Chancellor Julius Raab, see category 116, entire source.]